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ABSTRACT

This paper advocates combining two commonly employed perspectives--the cultural and the political--to overcome the limitations of using either perspective alone to explain and evaluate interactions within educational-administration settings. The mix of concepts adopted within cultural or political perspectives varies, which leads to differing approaches to the problem. The article uses the two perspectives to capitalize on the insights that each perspective can bring, thus avoiding the narrowness of focus inherent in a singular perspective. It discusses the nature of the cultural and the political as metaphors and outlines alternative strategies for combining them. The paper then turns to examples of school management that are critically reviewed from either the cultural or the political perspective. Key concepts incorporated in the proposed dual perspective are defined, followed by case studies in which the perspectives are used to analyze two interactions, one harmonious and one conflictual. Finally, the advantages and drawbacks of the strategy for combining perspectives are reviewed, and the wider applicability of the dual perspective is briefly considered. These applications demonstrate how the combined perspective can be used to unpack the relationship between culture and power while avoiding simplistic assumptions about consensual or conflictual bases of interaction. Contains 21 references. (RJM)

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# Combining Cultural and Political Perspectives on Educational Administration: the Best or Worst of Both Conceptual Worlds?

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**Combining Cultural and Political Perspectives on Educational Administration: the Best or Worst of Both Conceptual Worlds?**

This paper advocates combining two commonly employed perspectives - the cultural and the political - to overcome limitations of using either alone to explain and evaluate interaction within educational administration settings. The mix of concepts adopted within either perspective varies, leading researchers to seek out different aspects of phenomena and to give a different conceptual spin to their findings. A way forward advocated in this paper is to combine the two to reap the analytical benefit of insights that each perspective can bring while avoiding the narrowness of focus following from adherence to one or other.

Complexities of this endeavour are explored in the sections which follow. First, the nature of perspectives as metaphors and alternative strategies for combining them are discussed. Second, examples are critically reviewed of research on school management from either the cultural or the political perspective. Third, key concepts incorporated in the proposed dual perspective are stipulatively defined. Fourth, analysis according to this perspective is exemplified through accounts of interaction in one harmonious and one conflictual situation, drawing on findings from an investigation of school reorganisation. Finally, advantages and drawbacks of the strategy for combining perspectives are reviewed and the wider applicability of the dual perspective is briefly considered.

**Single, Mixed and Multiple Metaphors**

Any quest for one best theory to explain the social world is probably futile. Social phenomena are too complex for such reductionist explanation, and theories in the social sciences are both normative and culturally relative, reflecting beliefs and values of their creators who cannot escape their location within the social climate of their time. Theories orientate us towards phenomena in particular ways; it therefore seems more realistic to adopt the metatheoretical position that they constitute metaphors (Morgan 1986) highlighting some features of social phenomena while ignoring aspects that other metaphors would address. If no metaphor can be taken as fundamental, it follows that we may deepen analysis by using more than one metaphor to examine the same phenomenon. Mixing metaphors from different traditions is increasingly advocated to transcend the limited insight a single metaphor can give: Cuthbert (1984) identifies five; Bolman and Deal (1991) four; and Bush (1995), drawing on Cuthbert's work, six.

These metaphors, according to Bush (146-148):

> represent conceptually distinct approaches to the management of educational institutions. However, it is rare for a single theory to capture the reality of management in any particular school or college. Rather, aspects of several perspectives are present in different proportions within each institution. The applicability of each approach may vary with the event, the situation and the participants.

He argues that the validity of applying any metaphor depends on organisational characteristics like size. The political perspective is deemed less relevant to decision making in small primary (elementary) schools than in large secondary schools and colleges where staff compete for resources. Bush apparently assumes, first, that each perspective addresses an exclusive proportion of the 'reality' of particular organisational phenomena; and second, that certain phenomena may be present or absent in different situations. This view of metaphors seems overly restrictive. Surely it is more valid to assume that any perspective may bear on any situation in the social world. One limitation of much British research from a single perspective into primary and secondary schools stems from the possibility of interpreting the same phenomenon (like decision making) in both kinds of institution from alternative

perspectives. Secondary schools no more have a monopoly on political conflict over decisions about scarce resources than primary schools have on cultural cohesion leading to consensual decisions.

The approach of Bolman and Deal (1991) rests on the assumption that organisational phenomena may be interpreted from more than one perspective or 'frame'. They argue that most managers become stuck with their habitual frame, whereas:

> The ability to reframe experience enriches and broadens a leader's repertoire and serves as a powerful antidote to self-entrapment. Expanded choice enables managers to generate creative responses to the broad range of problems that they encounter...it can be enormously liberating for managers to realise that there is *always* more than one way to respond to any organisational problem or dilemma. Managers are imprisoned only to the degree that their palette of ideas is impoverished. (4, original emphasis)

Each frame contains a set of concepts enabling managers to develop their interpretation and normative image of how organisations should be managed, giving them something to emulate or reject according to their values. By switching between frames, managers enlarge the basis of understanding which informs their practice. However, concepts within different frames are not compatible: the cultural frame leads to interpretation of what holds people in organisations together, the political frame to what pulls them apart. As a consequence of adopting incompatible assumptions underpinning each frame, Bolman and Deal are forced to employ them sequentially in what may be termed a 'mixed metaphor' approach.

We can go further with integrating perspectives through a 'multiple metaphor' strategy. Cultural and political perspectives may be merged into a dual metaphor by adopting mutually compatible definitions of concepts drawn from each constituent perspective. Table 1 compares approaches of several researchers using these perspectives to examine school administration. It is intended, heuristically, to indicate how the approach towards perspectives moulds interpretation of findings, and how concepts must be rendered compatible for integration in a multiple metaphor.

(INSERT TABLE 1)

These writers have different purposes for theory development affecting their use of perspectives. Hoyle (1986) distinguishes between 'theory for understanding', whose purpose is to provide explanation (which may be antithetical to action) and 'theory for action', whose purpose is to guide practice. The 'theory for understanding' category may be subdivided according to the place of writers' value orientation. Some investigators have adopted an explicit critical stance either from the outset, framing their theory building and empirical efforts, or in the light of their findings. Others have retained a more distanced orientation towards what they variably acknowledge as value laden fields of enquiry, seeking explanations as a platform for making judgements based on diverse value positions. 'Theory for understanding', where a distanced orientation is adopted, may usefully be distinguished from what I will call 'theory for critical evaluation' where commitment to an overtly critical stance is made.

Second, the different perspectives are associated with varying approaches towards metaphors - whether single, mixed or multiple. Third, assumptions differ about the compass of central concepts underlying each perspective, with consequences for interpretation. Fourth, for single or mixed metaphor approaches, concepts within the analysis are identified which may be construed as belonging to the alternative metaphor. The final two points of comparison address contrasting interpretations of interaction between headteachers (principals) and other staff which is either synergistic or conflictual.

**The Need to Transcend Single Perspectives**

Nias et al (1989) employ a cultural perspective to explain interaction among primary school staff, portraying how they developed shared beliefs and values about how colleagues related to each other. The analysis emphasises subtle ways in which staff contribute to developing and maintaining their shared culture. Arguably, this single perspective may have distracted the researchers' attention from the possibility of differential use of power by heads and other staff in moulding the culture, of emergence of subcultures, or of conflict as the explanation for some interactions. Power may be underplayed but it does creep in, suggesting that the notion of organisational culture cannot grasp all that was significant. For example, they state:

> normative *control* was so pervasive that it is easy to lose sight of the fact that it too was the product of a *power differential.* Each school had a head with a strong 'mission' and well developed *political skills* who had been in post for at least ten years and to whom had accrued during that time a considerable amount of personal *authority* (15).

The power related concepts I have italicised surface because they explain how headteachers were uniquely placed to persuade other staff to accept their managerial values, even in situations of cultural accord. Synergistic interaction is explained as expressing shared beliefs and values, whereas conflicts are interpreted as being confronted or avoided consistent with underlying shared values about working towards compromise solutions.

Ball (1987), in contrast, aims to inform educational improvement according to explicit values:

> An understanding of the way that schools change (or stay the same) and therefore of the practical limits and possibilities of educational development, must take account of intra-organisational processes. This is particularly crucial in examining developments which are related to the achievement of more equal, more just, as well as more effective education (3).

His single metaphor approach is based on a political orientation that he calls a 'conflict perspective': 'I take schools...to be *arenas of struggle*; to be riven with actual or potential conflict between members; to be poorly coordinated; to be ideologically diverse' (19, original emphasis). Power is linked with struggle, whether overt or suppressed. Yet the narrowly conflictual view of power favours interpreting all interaction conflictually, a danger Ball acknowledges (19):

> having set an agenda for the study of micropolitics and institutional conflict in schools, I do not want to fall into the same trap as the social system theorists, of seeing conflict everywhere, where they saw consensus.

Conflict, however, dominates the analysis. Apparently harmonious interaction is interpreted as masking covert conflict, and cultural concepts creep in (20, emphasis added):

> interaction is centred upon the *routine*, mundane and, for the most part, uncontroversial running of the institution....routine organisational life is set within the *'negotiated order'*...a patterned construct of contrasts, *understandings, agreements* and *'rules'* which provides the basis of concerted action...In this way conflicts may remain normally implicit and subterranean, only occasionally bursting into full view.

The cultural concepts I have italicised play a subordinate role in Ball's approach but are akin to those featuring centrally in the interpretation of Nias and her colleagues. In both single metaphor analyses, concepts from the perspective *not* employed are present. The 'norm' of cabinet responsibility

articulated by Ball is a cultural idea; the 'personal authority' of the head articulated by Nias and her co-workers is a political concept. Concepts associated with the alternative perspective were required to grasp the range of phenomena found.

Southworth's (1995) single metaphor approach was developed to interpret and evaluate findings from a case study. It draws on Ball's perspective and appears similarly constrained, but his purposes reach further towards constructing an alternative normative theory. Ball (280) concludes with the statement: 'the alternative lies in the direction of *school democracy*. But that, as they say, is another story' (original emphasis). Southworth begins to tell the story by articulating a preferred critical approach to school leadership, offering advice on supporting heads with moving in this direction.

A conception of power as conflictual takes his analysis of a primary school headteacher's management practice along parallel lines with Ball's, developing the idea of 'normative control' to explain how the head used subtle means to get his way, such as promoting teachers who shared his values to management positions. The 'normative' element of the concept has cultural overtones, linked with the political notion of control. Harmonious interaction is viewed as resulting from the head's successful 'domination', acting to deflect or pre-empt most potential conflict and, on rare occasions when staff disputes arose, using normative control strategies such as deploying senior staff on his behalf.

The opposing interpretations following from these separate cultural and political perspectives are symptomatic of their incompatibility. One researcher's cultural cohesion is another's political domination. Concepts from both perspectives cannot be integrated with a cultural perspective restricted to cohesion and a political perspective restricted to conflict. How may they be brought together? One response is to broaden the constituent perspectives: the cultural orientation may allow for conflict between subcultures, while the political orientation may allow for synergistic use of resources to achieve shared interests. The political perspective adopted by Blase and Anderson (1995) goes part way. Their purposes are aligned with Southworth's, and they construct a normative theory of 'democratic, empowering leadership' embracing a more comprehensive definition of power. It is conceived as expressed in all interaction which may vary from conflictual ('power over'), through facilitative ('power through') to synergistic, where individuals participate as equals ('power with'). This conception transcends limitations of the narrower conflict perspective where power disappears unless actors are interpreted as wielding power *over* others, whether through conflict or domination. Yet the critically evaluative purpose of Blase and Anderson leads them to interpret much interaction in terms of domination by principals whether through overt, authoritarian means or the covert, manipulative means of more facilitative approaches where principals secure commitment of other staff to their agenda.

Their single metaphor approach also includes cultural concepts in the analysis. They argue that collaborative or 'diplomatic' interactions among teachers reflect a mutually supportive culture: 'the politics of diplomacy were consistent with the norms of equitable exchange and mutual benefit. Diplomatic actions, such as support among teachers, promoted networks of indebtedness and mutual assistance' (69). Principals' approach to power has a significant impact in 'setting the political 'tone' of the school' (73), either promoting collaborative and reciprocal or conflictual and self oriented interactions by other staff. Significantly for my analysis, they postulate that both forms of interaction may coexist - the bottom line interpretation here is not predetermined as necessarily either synergistic or conflictual.

This more comprehensive view of power avoids the problem conflict perspectives face over allowing for synergistic interaction. Yet even a single metaphor approach which allows for synergistic and conflictual interaction gives limited purchase on why people use power. Blase and Anderson appear to resort to cultural concepts because they help explain uses of power through inferences about beliefs

and values guiding principals and other staff, how far these beliefs and values are shared, and how uses of power by different individuals and groups may contribute to changing or sustaining their own beliefs and values and those of other parties. Culture and power are intimately connected.

If the mixed metaphor approach of Bolman and Deal expands the number of concepts employed through sequential interpretation from each perspective, their definition nevertheless leads to alternate, incompatible explanations. They are forced to employ one perspective at a time precisely because their version of each perspective renders it incompatible with others. The cultural perspective is, for Bolman and Deal, about the shared implicit beliefs, norms and values that promote cultural cohesion as a largely irrational and unconscious process; the political perspective is restricted to conflict.

The dual metaphor approach to integrating the cultural and political perspectives rests on assumptions that interaction may be synergistic or conflictual; relevant beliefs and values may or may not be shared with other parties to interaction; and compatible versions of concepts can be taken from each constituent perspective. In seeking to explain synergistic interaction inside senior management teams in secondary schools (Wallace and Hall 1994), interpretation focuses on the degree to which beliefs and values about teamwork are shared, how past use of power by team members has brought about this shared culture and how the culture guides use of power to achieve shared interests in the present. Conversely, conflictual interaction is explained by examining the differing beliefs and values guiding use of power by team members in attempting to realise incompatible interests. Headteachers' unique position of authority gives them greater power than their team colleagues to shape the team culture relating to teamwork, but the latter also have informal sources of power to buy into or reject headteachers' model of teamwork and its cultural assumptions. Amongst these contrasting approaches, therefore, the dual metaphor alone explicitly links culture and power as equal and integral components of the one analysis.

**The Cultural and Political Perspective and its Application**

Here concepts defined in summarising the dual perspective must be restricted to those giving deepest insights in my research. A simple definition of organisational culture is 'the way we do things around here' (Bower 1966), which implicitly encompasses rejection of alternatives: ways we don't do things around here. Culture is largely internalised, and the norms or rules of behaviour guiding interaction among those who subscribe to a culture rest on shared symbols, beliefs and values. Norms may be explicit, perhaps enshrined in a formal policy, or implicit, becoming noticeable only when transgressed. Symbolic elements of culture are those where patterns of action represent a shared value, amounting to rituals: regularised sequences of action including ceremonies entailing celebration (as when staff, parents and students participate in a social event to mark the closing of a school). A school staff professional culture encompasses beliefs and values spanning education, administration and relationships. Where groups share distinctive beliefs and values, they may form subcultures. In such 'differentiated cultures' (Meyerson and Martin 1987), meanings are shared within subcultural boundaries, but there is disjunction between the beliefs and values of the different groups.

School mergers often bring together experienced staff who may retain allegiance to the culture in their last school, resulting in an initial period of 'cultural fragmentation', where individuals discover through interaction how far their pre-merger cultures overlap or diverge. This experience marks the beginning of the cultural transition through which staff go in learning to work together in the new institution (Wallace, 1996). Transition may lead to varied outcomes, from emergence of a unified culture and identification with the new school to creation of incompatible subcultures, often featuring continuing allegiance to individuals' pre-merger cultures. In the latter case, fragmentation

may become a form of 'balkanisation' through coalescence of these distinctive subcultures. Hargreaves (1992) coined this term to refer to the staff culture common in secondary schools where loyalties form inside subject departments, with indifference or even hostility to other groups, the inward looking subcultures coexisting in tension. The way we do things around here is to protect the interests of the group with whom individuals identify most strongly, rather than taking those of the entire staff into account. Headteachers have been identified as the key 'cultural leaders' (Nias et al 1989) in their schools, promoting shared beliefs through tactics such as articulating their vision and their expectations of colleagues, and indicating where practice is unacceptable.

Following Giddens (1984), I take power to mean 'transformative capacity': the capability to intervene in events so as to alter their course. Expression of power need not necessarily imply conflict; parties to interaction who cooperate synergistically have ability to make things happen. Equally, each protagonist in a conflict situation may employ transformative capacity to achieve opposing goals. It is useful to distinguish between two forms of power (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980): authority means use of resources legitimated by individuals' beliefs and values associated with status including the right, often backed by law, to apply sanctions. In contrast, influence refers to informal use of resources where there is no recourse to sanctions linked to authority, though other sanctions (such as withdrawal of support) may be available. While access to resources varies, any individual is likely to have recourse to some form of influence. Parties to interaction are implicated in what Giddens calls a 'dialectic of control', a flow of action and response where each party acts to realise her or his interest and responds to others' attempt to achieve theirs, which may or may not coincide. Conversely, in everyday situations no individual has absolute power: it is distributed, however unequally, within and between institutions and system levels.

The cultural and political perspective offers a tool for exploring interaction across and within education system levels, as happens when local education authorities (LEAs - the equivalent of large school districts, some containing several hundred schools) mount reorganisation initiatives in response to central government pressure to remove surplus student places. These initiatives consist of two consecutive stages: first, the drafting of LEA formative proposals, consultation with interested parties in the locality including parents of schools scheduled for reorganisation, and the submission of formal proposals to central government; second, implementation in the LEA and its schools of such proposals as win central government approval. The rationale for these LEA initiatives is to downsize provision to match the supply of school places in the area more closely with reduced current and projected local need.

The two examples of interaction are taken from qualitative research (reported more fully in Wallace and Pocklington 1998). Focused, interpretive case studies (Merriam, 1988), informed by techniques of data analysis developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), were undertaken in two LEAs and 18 of their schools (the latter reducing to ten as closures and mergers took place). A total of 324 interviews were conducted over two years, backed by collection of documents, at both LEA level (focusing on management tasks including liaison with schools being studied) and school level (concentrating on tasks of managing reorganisation and its impact on staff and governors - approximating to members of school boards in the USA, but each school has its own governing body).

**Orchestrating Redeployment: LEA Responsibility without Power?**

Implementation of a complex innovation like LEA wide reorganisation of schooling entails an intricate network of interactions within and between schools, their communities, the LEA, and central government. One focus for interaction was the delicate business of reallocating teaching and support staff displaced by reorganisation. The following analysis addresses the question: how were

LEA staff able to broker redeployment of school staff whose jobs would be removed through reorganisation, and so avoid redundancies, despite governors of each school that would emerge from reorganisation having exclusive authority over staff appointments in their school?

Reorganisation proposals approved by central government in one LEA gave LEA staff authority to implement measures to reduce the number of schools within the LEA and to fill those that would remain. Some 30 institutions were to be taken out, including all middle schools; any temporary classrooms were to be removed from surviving institutions; and most existing first and high schools were to change character by expanding to absorb students dispersed from closing middle schools. While some staff from closing schools had skills and experience suitable for teaching in those which were to expand, an overall reduction in teaching and non-teaching staff was required.

A substantial number of staff with permanent contracts faced the possibility of redundancy. With the advent of the central government local management of schools (LMS) initiative (site-based management), authority to appoint school staff had passed from the LEA to school governors. In a previous reorganisation LEA staff had held authority to terminate the contract of staff in all schools in the LEA and simply 'slot in' individuals wherever there were vacancies. Now LEA staff could only request - not instruct - governors of schools with vacancies to accept staff under threat of redundancy, while governors' legal obligation accompanying their new level of authority over appointments was to seek the best candidate for the job, rather than support the LEA by restricting the field to local candidates displaced by reorganisation. Within the dialectic of control between LEA staff, governors, school staff and their union representatives, how did LEA staff manage to achieve a situation by the end of the implementation period where just three displaced teachers remained who had failed to secure an appointment in post-reorganisation schools, despite having lost their authority over appointments?

*Recipe for Success*

Amongst the key factors explaining this outcome were, first, a widespread belief in the authority of the LEA continuing to exist as a legacy from the era before LMS, disposing school staff and governors favourably towards LEA officers and so empowering them when negotiating appointments. One secondary headteacher commented that 'the LEA is a good authority' and stated how he assumed, in handling reorganisation, that '[the LEA Chief Education Officer] is my boss' - a sentiment far removed from the spirit of the central government reform legislation designed to reduce LEA control over schooling.

Second, LEA staff enjoyed strong credibility with most headteachers, governors, other staff and teacher union representatives. Officers responsible for staffing had served in the LEA for many years and were highly respected at school level. Their intimate knowledge of local schools and staff also empowered them as they were usually able to put forward staffing proposals which were acceptable to other parties, so sustaining their credibility as a platform for future negotiations. Other officers hinted at an LEA staff culture guiding such actions, one referring to the principle that LEA staff worked together to ensure they gave consistent information to those affected by reorganisation: 'We have a phrase in this area about singing from the same hymnsheet...no-one gets a mixed message.' Another summed it up as the LEA's 'professional approach'. Typical of this orientation was the effort made by an officer to ensure fairness by persuading headteachers of schools scheduled to expand to advertise their vacancies at the same time in the staff bulletin issued by the LEA to all its schools: 'We would like to see them advertised as a bunch so that it doesn't appear that one [school] is trying to steal a march on the others.' Credibility was never stronger than the last negotiation, and officers were acutely aware of the ongoing need to be perceived as offering an acceptable match of staff to

any vacancies arising, as opinion on their performance was swiftly disseminated through the local grapevine.

Third, a formal agreement had been reached with all governing bodies and unions to support an LEA policy of avoiding redundancies wherever possible. A code of practice stated that:

> The responsible body for the management of staff, the governing body or the Authority, will make every effort to avoid compulsory redundancy, and in avoiding compulsory redundancy will seek, in consultation with the Authority or the governing body respectively and staff representatives, to implement a policy of redeployment.

The code of practice was not binding on any governing body but, though it constituted solely a source of influence, belief in the duty to support this code of practice remained widely shared among governing bodies and headteachers, guiding their use of authority over appointments. Occasionally they could be faced with a tension between contradictory beliefs, either where officers put forward a displaced teacher to be considered for redeployment with a reputation of marginal competence among governors and staff, or where governors wished to choose from a wider field of candidates than existed in the LEA. Belief in a duty to support the LEA policy then sat uneasily alongside the equally strong belief in doing what was best for the school. Even here, most governors and heads honoured the agreement.

Fourth, LEA influence on governing bodies was strengthened through the contribution of their LEA nominated governors. To the extent that they had authority to contribute directly to appointment decisions, LEA representatives on governing bodies supported LEA officers by acting on the advice that they had authority to offer, but governors had no obligation to heed. The strength of 'political will' to support redeployment was a key to winning union support. One teacher union representative hinted at how the dialectic of control between LEA and unions might have been characterised by union resistance otherwise:

> If ever there was something that could have prevented reorganisation going through, it would be the threat of redundancy, which means we would be turning from our support role in easing people through the process to a view of saying, 'There are redundancies threatened at this school, we need to be looking at strike ballots and negotiating strategies around that area.'

Fifth, the LEA did hold authority over decisions related to beneficiaries of the voluntary premature retirement (VPR) scheme introduced at the outset of reorganisation. One LEA officer dubbed it 'the oil in the gearbox', because VPR could act as a strong incentive, not only to staff who were eligible, but also to governing bodies who stood to gain through the opportunity VPR might offer to appoint new staff, to make savings within the school budget by appointing a younger replacement on a lower salary, or to shed a member of staff over whose competence they were equivocal. Another LEA officer testified to the potency of VPR as a source of influence over staff appointments: 'VPR is one of the few sources of power left...without a scheme we could not, under any circumstances, have have done this reorganisation.' Norms framing LEA staff actions rested on the legal parameters for the scheme, such as eligibility being limited to staff aged 50 or over on permanent contracts with at least two years' service in the LEA. Authority over VPR enabled LEA staff to invite applications from all those eligible in closing schools, and so empowered them substantially to reduce the number of staff whose redeployment they were committed to securing. It also represented a strong source of influence over governors' staffing appointment decisions in schools which would survive reorganisation where it suited their perceived interests.

A common strategy was for LEA officers to suggest to governors that a VPR in one school could be linked with avoidance of redundancy in another. In two instances, a deputy headteacher in an expanding first school applied for VPR. LEA officers brokered an informal agreement with the headteacher and governors that a teacher in the school would be promoted to the deputy headship which would then fall vacant, and that a teacher from another school under threat of redundancy would be appointed to fill the promoted teacher's place. This agreement was not binding on governors but, should they fail to honour it by, say, appointing a new deputy headteacher from outside the LEA and so sever any tie with avoiding a redundancy, the law governing VPR meant that the governing body would become liable for financing any enhancement of the pension from their school budget - a strong disincentive.

Unions had been won over through LEA investment in the VPR package to suit members' interest in maximising their financial compensation, with the added pressure that the present scheme might constitute an unrepeatable offer with a limited shelf life. An LEA administrator concerned with VPR testified to the synergy achieved within the dialectic of control between LEA and unions:

> Professional associations [unions] have been very supportive. We do have extremely good relationships with them because as an Authority we are a very generous employer and professional associations have been selling it to their members. The [VPR] scheme may be revised following reorganisation; it will certainly be managed very differently and therefore it may be almost their last opportunity to be released with very generous benefits and it's to their advantage to take it.

Sixth, LEA staff, headteachers and governors worked synergistically to maximise their influence over the formal decision making procedure. Legally, headteacher and deputy posts must be advertised nationally, but it is not stipulated how governors should go about shortlisting or interviewing candidates. Staff selection was conducted according to a belief that the letter of the law must be scrupulously followed, but influence was allowable within the parameters of the law to reduce the risk of the informal agreement being upset as the procedure unfolded. The advertisement would be worded so as to discourage outsiders from applying. One advert for a primary school deputy headship included information that the school would change character within the LEA reorganisation scheme, continuing that therefore '...a number of local schools will close. In this situation the Authority must look to protect the interests of all employees under threat of redundancy. The governors see the deputy head vacancy as an opportunity to assist the LEA in this task.' Often, there were no applicants other than the person earmarked for the job under the informal agreement. Posts where the national advertising requirement did not apply would always be advertised inside the school concerned, but not in the LEA staff bulletin where the agreement was to make an internal appointment. A written application was always required, and any appointment would be made following an interview.

Finally, the LEA had authority over other aspects of reorganisation which provided incentives for heads and governors. They were a source of influence over staff appointments as they fostered a climate where the LEA was seen to support school level interests. Among the most significant areas were investment in new building and refurbishment in schools where incorporated in reorganisation proposals; 'transition funding', LEA payments to assist staff with preparation for changes; and staff development support, including provision of LEA courses suitable for redeployed staff who would be teaching a new age range of pupils. LEA staff proved able to wield a combination of influence and authority according to their longstanding culture of professional practice. They nurtured the largely receptive culture among school staff and governors through their part in LEA-school level interaction which empowered them to bring about large scale redeployment, although deprived of their one time authority to make appointment decisions.

**Managing Merger: A Missing Ingredient?**

The second example focuses on internal school level interaction, considering the question: why did fragmentation of the staff culture endure in a primary school created through merger of four institutions? Under LEA reorganisation proposals, three first schools and a middle school in the same rural area were amalgamated to form one primary school on the former middle school site, with an annexe in a neighbouring village three miles away in the premises of one of the former first schools. Three structural features of this reorganisation arrangement were likely to affect the experience of cultural transition for staff in the post-merger institution. First, the strong identities of the pre-merger schools meant that staff redeployed from them to the new school might retain allegiance to their pre-merger professional culture. Second, these staff knew each other to a varied extent and would have some beliefs about practice in the other pre-merger schools according to their local reputation. Third, the creation of an annexe some distance from the main site would limit contact between the staff working there and colleagues based in the main building. How far the person appointed as headteacher of the post-merger school attempted to provide cultural leadership in shaping the course of cultural transition for staff would depend on his or her professional beliefs and values informing choices of action. It would also be affected by these structural features, other processes and events surrounding the merger, and beliefs and values of other staff appointed to the new school.

Circumstances leading up to this merger precluded any substantial cultural leadership activity. Appointment of the new headteacher, from a small school elsewhere in the LEA, was made only a few months before reorganisation. She was able to participate in the appointment of all other staff and, though her designate status did not give her formal authority over appointments, she was able to wield influence in tandem with the authority of governors. She had no choice over redeployment of the deputy headteacher and another teacher from the middle school which was to become the main site of the new institution. Since staff appointments were not completed until immediately prior to reorganisation, it was not feasible to bring the whole staff together beforehand. Meanwhile she and other staff were preoccupied with immediate tasks, in her case working to ensure she handed over a smoothly running school to her successor. In the limited time available to devote to planning for the new school, the head designate gave priority to meeting parents and seeking to persuade them of the merits of the new school; determining the internal organisation, complicated by the split site; sorting out finances; and monitoring the refurbishment programme. Aware that little had been done on creating school policies and curriculum planning, the head designate used her authority to set aside two staff training days for this purpose at the beginning of the term following reorganisation. She also encouraged future colleagues, during the summer vacation, to meet those with whom they would be working most closely to prepare provisional curriculum and lesson plans.

*Cultural Fragmentation*

The eleven teaching staff had been appointed from no less than eight schools, including five teachers from the four merging institutions. To the extent that all staff were familiar with different practices linked with divergent staff cultures in the schools from which they came, they were bound to experience some sense of disorientation as they began to work together. Initially, the new staff culture was fragmented, individuals referring back to the beliefs and values of their past culture. The part played by the new headteacher proved pivotal in shaping the process of cultural transition over the first term.

Several factors combined to prolong fragmentation. First, the original purpose for the two staff training days was overtaken by a new short term priority forced on the staff by late completion of

refurbishment work. The start of term was delayed for younger pupils and their teachers were unable to organise their classrooms for three days. In consequence these teachers, assisted by their junior deparment colleagues, had to work all weekend sorting through resources inherited from the pre-merger schools before setting out their rooms. There was consensus among staff that the rushed beginning had left them 'on their knees before the teaching had even started'.

Second, the urgency of dealing with day to day organisational issues meant there was limited discussion of whole school policies or curriculum plans, so individuals fell back on their pre-merger practices. One teacher recalled the first weeks of term: 'That was very depressing...I think in a way we were all a bit like headless chickens running around to begin with.' When the head subsequently used her authority to convene a large number of after-school meetings to establish coherent practice across both school sites, the extra work added to the already heavy pressure on other staff. Morale dropped as the perception grew amongst them that time spent in meetings was not always put to effective use.

Third, aspects of the headteacher's approach to managing the school ran counter to beliefs of most other staff about how she should operate, helping to perpetuate fragmentation of the staff culture while giving rise to their shared perception that she did not have their interests at heart. She had firm ideas about the direction in which school policies and practice should go. Where she consulted other staff, she employed her authority to delimit the contribution they could make. She would put forward proposals and invite comments from colleagues, rather than encouraging them to initiate or contribute to debate, and most other staff perceived that they were not being accorded a genuine opportunity to shape practice. They were inhibited from challenging the headteacher because they also believed she was entitled to operate in this way, possibly reflecting their shared belief in a management hierarchy where most power resides, legitimately, at the top.

There was disapproval of the headteacher's external orientation. In accordance with her authority to establish her own priorities and with her professional beliefs, she actively promoted major social events, aware of their symbolic importance in creating a positive image of the school among stakeholders; she invested time in publicising the school; and she was often away from the institution, striving to raise extra funds from outside sources. A contrary belief held by some other staff was that, at this early stage in the school's development, the head should have been in school putting policies, curriculum plans and the school development plan in place and actively supporting her colleagues. They judged that the head undervalued them. While she claimed to recognise the importance of commending colleagues and expressing her appreciation, it did not appear to be high on her list of priorities: 'I do try to do that [praise and encourage] but sometimes I'm too busy.' Other staff perceived they were taken for granted: 'We have come to see that is just the way things are...nobody gets any thanks for anything.' The teachers based in the annexe felt particularly isolated as the headteacher generally spent less than half a day per week there.

Fourth, professional differences emerged between other staff, suggesting incompatibility between the cultures of their pre-merger institutions. One source of tension was the perception that some staff did not always maintain confidences, one declaring: 'There isn't the trust - I know certain things aren't confidential.' A consequence was that individuals became guarded about expressing opinions: 'The atmosphere in our staffroom, it's all wrong - people don't have the trust to actually speak out...You feel you're rocking the boat [if you do so].'

*Emergent Balkanisation*

While these factors combined to prolong fragmentation of the staff culture, others appeared to stimulate individuals to form subgroups with whom they felt some affinity, coalescing around shared

critical beliefs about individuals allied with other groups. First, the head used her authority to empower a minority among staff whose expertise she valued and publicly acknowledged. They were taken into her confidence and soon became perceived by others as a favoured group. Creation of an in-group united others through their sense of being outsiders. The favoured few and the headteacher showed signs of firming up into a coalition whose members operated synergistically, each able to take initiatives in line with her professional beliefs. One was a teacher appointed from the headteacher's previous school. The other, from elsewhere, recognised the distancing effect of her actions: 'I tried to put a lot into this school. That perhaps alienated me from a lot of the staff.' She had used influence to realise her interest by winning the headteacher's support, subscribing to the belief that she must make the running: 'The difference between me and perhaps some other members of staff is that I'll go and tell her [the head]...if she hadn't got much idea then I'd put something forward.'

A minority of other staff perceived that they could not win the head's respect and support, and so exerted influence by withdrawing from engagement with others: 'I don't think we are a team at the moment...once people are hurt they put the barriers up.' The perceived inequality of treatment of staff by the headteacher transgressed the principle of fairness which other staff valued, one stating: 'You have to be seen to be even handed.' The remainder lacked confidence, in the circumstances, to put forward their view.

Second, the headteacher made explicit judgements about the quality of education provided in the pre-merger schools, implying to those from the middle school that they were being held responsible for shortcomings of the school where they had worked. They resented repeated references by the headteacher to the past made 'in a pejorative way'. One commented: 'I have got the feeling that all in the past must be forgotten and is of no consequence whatsoever.' Conversely, the headteacher employed her authority to impose practices from her previous school, such as a reading scheme.

Third, the deputy headteacher, who had been involved in management in her pre-merger school, perceived that she was now denied a meaningful administrative role. The headteacher had no prior experience of working with a deputy headteacher, and the latter may have expected that what she had been previously empowered to do would also happen in this situation. Their conflictual interaction contributed to lowering staff morale further, especially where each publicly criticised the other. Despite her marginalisation, the deputy headteacher used influence by supporting colleagues and confronting the headteacher, becoming a figurehead for their resentments. However, lack of delegated authority meant that she had little impact on the longer term development of policies and practices.

After several months the beginnings of balkanisation were evident, coalitions emerging partly along pre-merger lines. One constituted the headteacher and the two colleagues whom she favoured, forming a subculture insofar as they shared complementary values. The second, forming in reaction against the attitude of the headteacher towards their members, consisted of the deputy headteacher and a teacher who had also worked before the merger in the middle school which became the main site of the present institution, augmented by a third teacher from another pre-merger school. Other staff appeared to belong to less closely allied groups, drawn together by what they held in common.

Over these few months, therefore, cultural fragmentation had shifted towards balkanisation. Coalitions were forming, members of each sharing their own subculture, relating to pre-merger cultures which were more or less divergent. At the point fieldwork ended, the deputy headteacher had just been appointed to a headship elsewhere, encouraged both by the headteacher and by LEA staff who had become aware of the tensions in the school. It seems unlikely that her departure would, of itself, bring all remaining staff together. The evidence suggested that cultural leadership

was the missing ingredient: the head would have to make fuller use of her unique position to provide it if a more unified staff culture was to welded.

**Conclusion**

These applications show how the combined perspective can be used to unpack the relationship between culture and power while avoiding simplistic assumptions about consensual or conflictual bases of interaction. One analysis teased out how LEA staff were saddled with responsibility without the concomitant authority they enjoyed prior to recent central government reforms, yet were not without power where they could foster a receptive culture among those who became subject to their influence as 'honest brokers' of staff appointment decisions. The other explored how the professional culture of individuals from different institutional backgrounds affected their differential use of power, leading to tensions among staff in a newly created school who formed into disunited factions.

Arguably, the dual perspective offers analysts the best of two conceptual worlds, enabling answers to be sought to questions which link culture and power, such as: who has power to shape the staff professional culture in educational organisations? How do cultural allegiances impact reciprocally on the extent and limits of the uses of power in interaction? How may actions according to contradictory cultural allegiances induce or avoid conflict?

Yet there is also a downside. First, the analysis is complicated, with potentially double the number of concepts of either single perspective, and these concepts must articulate with each other. Any theoretical orientation is bound to be reductionist to a degree because of the effort to find patterns to render complex social phenomena comprehensible. The corollary of attempting a more sophisticated and so less reductionist orientation to capture more of the phenomena at hand is a more complex interpretation which runs the risk of becoming incomprehensible. Second, some fine grain of the analysis possible from within each single perspective is lost, since the full range of concepts they offer is not employed. Third, compatible versions of each constituent perspective must be adopted if they are to be integrated with each other, ruling out the possibility of combining single perspectives that rest on incompatible assumptions. As Bolman and Deal recognised, a political perspective based on a purely conflictual view of interaction would not sit easily alongside a cultural perspective based on a view of interaction as promoting accord through a largely irrational, implicit and deeply symbolic process. Broadening conceptual horizons by combining perspectives may compromise the very analytical purchase on social phenomena that incompatible versions of different perspectives may provide. Those with a strong allegiance to a particular version of a single perspective would probably, therefore, regard the multiple metaphor strategy as offering the worst of both conceptual worlds because it weakens the analytical purchase of their favoured perspective.

Nevertheless, such an approach evidently has potential for wider application in exploring interaction (see Hall 1996; Wallace 1996, 1998). An agenda for further research and conceptual development could profitably include:

- empirical investigations using the cultural and political perspective, whether at the same or across different system levels, or amongst the diversity of institutional settings in different sectors of education;
- extension of the variety of concepts which might be incorporated in this dual metaphor;
- conceptual bridgework to create other multiple metaphors by seeking compatible areas of linkage and assessing their fitness for different analytical purposes.

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Table 1: Contrasting approaches to employment of cultural and political perspectives

| *Criterion* | *Nias et al 1989* | *Ball 1987* | *Southworth 1995* | *Blase and Anderson 1995* | *Bolman and Deal 1991* | *Wallace and Hall 1994* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Focus of study* | research on staff relationships in UK primary schools | research on secondary teachers' views of UK heads' behaviour | research on a UK primary head's approach to management | US teachers' views of principals' behavour, case studies of two principals | management handbook based on US experience and research | research on UK secondary school senior management teams |
| *Purpose of theorising* | understanding leading to advice on action | critical evaluation | critical evaluation leading to conception of leadership and advice on action | critical evaluation leading to leadership theory | advice about action | understanding leading to advice on action |
| *Type of metaphor* | single | single | single | single | mised, including separate cultural and political | multiple, combined cultural and political |
| *Assumptions about key concept in main perspective* | culture becomes widely shared among staff | power is conflictual | power is largely conflictual | power may be conflictual or synergistic | culture - leaders promote shared culture through vision, power - conflictual | culture - beliefs and values shared within subcultures, power may be conflictual or synergistic, beliefs and values reciprocally shape use of power |
| *use of concepts from alternative perspective* | use of power, especially by heads | norms and rules govern routine interaction | normative control by head and other staff | principals attempt to manage staff culture through manipulation | sequential use of different frames including cultural, political | simultaneous use of concepts from cultural and political perspectives |
| *interpretation of synergistic interaction between head and other staff* | cohesion due to shared beliefs and values | heads dominate other staff through controlling activity, so avoiding conflict | head dominates other staff through controlling activity, so avoiding conflict | most principals dominate, a few share power with other staff | cohesion due to leaders' promotion of shared beliefs and values | cohesion due to shared beliefs and values resulting from use of power by heads and other staff |
| *interpretation of conflictural interaction between head and other staff* | shared beliefs and values about compromise enable conflicts to be avoided or resolved | each actor uses power in struggle to realise incompatible interests | head resolves conflicts through normative control or personal interventions | each actor uses power in struggle to realise incompatible interests | each actor uses power in struggle to realise incompatible interests | each actor uses powe according to beliefs and values to realise incompatible interests |